The Coolness of Peter.

By EDGAR WELTON COOLEY.

"B-R-R-R-ING!" sounded a bell shrilly in the stillness.

Peter Quiggles opened his eyes with a start, then sat bolt upright and stared. Not four feet from him stood a man with a mask over his eyes. He was holding a dark lantern, flashing the light glaringly in Peter's face.

"How dare you," began the man with the mask, offended—"how dare you set an alarm clock to go off at the very moment I'm ransacking the house; D'ye want to scare me to death? How do you know but I might be subject to heart failure or something and that the sudden fright"—

"I—I'm sorry," began Peter humbly. "I didn't mean to disturb you. I—I can't sleep comfortably on one side all the time, you know, and I have to set the alarm to awaken me so I can turn over."

"Oh!" said the man apprehendingly. "Well, don't let it occur again."

"I'll try not to," replied Peter obligingly. "But, you know," he hesitated, "you can't always tell about that clock. You can't always anticipate its behavior. It is a very absentminded clock and possesses some very peculiar notions of its own. Really it is the most aggravating clock you ever saw. Why, once I set the alarm for 4 o'clock in the morning. I wished to go to the station to meet my uncle, you know. He was a very rich bachelor, with no immediate family. Besides, he was in exceedingly poor health. And, would you believe it, that miserable clock betrayed the confidence imposed in it?"

"And your uncle?" asked the man interestedly.

"My uncle was compelled to hunt me up and ring us out of bed. It was very embarrassing. Of course we had to make some kind of an explanation. But unfortunately, you know, my wife and I had no opportunity to consult together. We told entirely different stories. That made my uncle suspicious."

"Naturally," said the man.

"Then, to make matters worse," resumed Peter, with a sigh, "my uncle was a chronic story teller, one of those people who take a frenzied delight in relating a long narrative with a joke at the end of it—the kind of a joke you know that you don't really laugh at until the next day."

"I understand," said the man, taking a seat on the edge of the bed resignedly. "I've heard them kind o' jokes myself. I call 'em vaccination jokes. They have a point to 'em all right, but they don't take until later. Besides, they are pretty near as bad as having the smallpox."

The man chuckled softly. "Well," Peter continued, "at breakfast that morning this uncle of mine told one of his stories. It was during the days when nearly everybody had one of those silly little things they called chestnut bells. You remember?"

"Perfectly," said the man.

"Well, at the very moment my uncle sprang his joke and leaned back to enjoy our mirth that clock—that unregenerate, malicious clock"— Peter laughed long and loudly.

"Don't!" cried the man in a hoarse whisper, glancing affrightedly about. "You'll arouse the household."

"There isn't anybody else in this part of the house," reassured Peter, "but my wife, asleep in the next room, and she's deaf, you know. Really she is so deaf that I can wear a red necktie, green checkered trousers and a purple vest and come home any hour of the night without awakening her."

"You're lucky," said the man, "and being lucky"—

"Lucky!" repeated Peter. "I'm so lucky"—

"Never mind about that," interrupted the man. "I was just going to remark that I never saw a lucky man who didn't have money."

"Money?" replied Peter. "Of course I have money. Really, I've got so much money that I can't fall down without breaking a bill, you know. Once I"—

"Just hand it over, then," interposed the man with the mask commandingly.

"Do I understand that you wish me to hand my money over to you?" queried Peter cautiously.

"That's what I remarked," replied the man, "and you'd better be quick about it if you don't want"—

"My dear sir," said Peter impressively, "as one who has speculated more or less successfully, I beg to give you a little timely advice."

"See here," said the man irritably, "I ain't going to waste any more time with you. I've wasted too much already."

"Why, so you have," remarked Peter thoughtfully, "but you see it isn't exactly my fault. I didn't invite you here, and, really, I'm not insisting upon your staying, you know. Maybe you're waiting for me to order you out?"

"Well, you are cool," said the man admiringly.

"Of course I'm cool," replied Peter. "It's very convenient to be cool sometimes—on a cold winter's night, for instance. You see, your wife won't put her feet against you if you are cool."

The man with the mask laughed softly, then arose to his feet. "Look here," he said, "are you going to give me that money or ain't you? I've got a gun in my hand, it's pointing at you, it's loaded, and my finger is on the trigger."

"It certainly is very kind of you to warn me of my danger," replied Peter gratefully. "The light of your lantern blinds me so that I had not noticed you had a gun. But, really, won't you please point it in some other direction? It makes me nervous, you know, and when I get nervous my memory fails me quite suddenly. I might forget where I put my money. I always experience considerable trouble in remembering what I do with all my money anyhow."

"Come, come," said the man. "Hand it over. Fork it out. I can't stay here all night. I want to be going."

"Since you speak of it," replied Peter wearily, "I really wish you would go. I would enjoy going back to sleep, you know. I'm tired. You see, I was out to the lodge last night. Do you belong to any lodge? No? Well, the union, then—you belong to the union, of course?"

"I see very plainly," said the man resolutely, "that you do not intend to give me that money peacefully. Guess I'd better"—

"Why, my dear sir," responded Peter naively, "I haven't refused, have I? Really I beg your pardon if I have appeared backward in complying with your most natural and reasonable request. I am not unmindful, you know, that you are at this moment a guest in my house, and I certainly meant no disrespect. How much money do you want?"

"All you have," replied the man gruffly.

"But, my dear sir," protested Peter humbly, "if you could just manage to get along with a trifle less—just a trifle, you know—perhaps some time in the future I can repay your kindness and consideration. You see, tomorrow morning before breakfast is the day and the hour when our cook expects her week's wages. Possibly you lack the experience that would enable you to thoroughly understand the situation but really, you know, I cannot imagine any position more embarrassing in which a man could be placed than to be forced to face his cook on such a momentous occasion without a cent in his pocket, and my cook unfortunately is a very robust cook. Really I shudder to even think of such a predicament."

"To thunder with the cook!" replied the man shortly. "I want to know if you're going to"—

"And, then, there are the gas man and the iceman," resumed Peter. "Of course I realize that you have nearly as much claim upon my money as they have—really it is rather difficult to discriminate between you—but it wouldn't be just right, you know, to give you all the money and not save a cent for the other holdup men, now, would it? Of course I understand that between you all you will get all my money anyhow, and I'm really not much concerned who gets the most, only I don't want to appear partial, you know."

"You can do just as you please," replied the man determinedly. "You have your choice between giving me all your money and taking the consequences. I'm not here for my health I tell you."

"Oh, well, if you feel that way about it," said Peter resignedly, "you'll find my trousers on a chair at the foot of the bed. My purse is in the right hip pocket."

The man with the mask walked to the chair, slipped his hand in the pocket indicated and pulled out a black wallet. Emptying the contents upon the bed, he counted them deliberately.

"See here," he said indignantly, "there is only $10.24 here!"

"What!" gasped Peter breathlessly, leaping out upon the floor. "How—much—did you say?"

"Ten dollars and twenty-four cents," replied the man.

"Are you sure?" demanded Peter in an agony of despair. "Are you certain you haven't made a mistake?"

"No," said the man. "That's all there is."

"Oh, dear, dear!" wailed Peter. "I see it all. I didn't want to believe it but I guess it must be true. It really is too bad. I don't see why she did it. She might have known"—

"She?" said the man. "Who?"

"My wife," replied Peter tearfully. "I am exceedingly sorry, but she bear you to it, you know."

"Well," said the man, rather disappointedly, "I reckon this will have to do then. But next time"—

"Pardon me," interrupted Peter, who had followed him to the door, "but really I am afraid you will fall down the stairs. It is so dark behind that lantern. Wait. I will turn on the light. There; now you can watch me and see where you are going at the same time."

"Thank you," said the man, backing slowly down the stairs, his revolver still in his hand. "As I was going to remark, I never met anybody who was quite"—

"No; that isn't right," said Peter. "You have to turn that small knob first. There; that unlocks the door. But you were saying"—

"I was going to say," again began the man, looking up at Peter, but placing one hand behind him and pulling open the door, "that I never"—

But two policemen suddenly sprang through the door and pinioned the man's arms behind his back.

"Really, I am sorry," grinned Peter, "but I guess you will have to finish your sentence in jail, won't you? You see, that bell was a burglar alarm. You rang it when you entered my room, and unfortunately, you know, it is connected with an automatic device at the police station. They were rather long coming, but I trust you found my companionship agreeable. I certainly did my best to entertain you."

"Say," said the man, submitting quietly to the officers, "you lied to me about the iceman, didn't you? Your wife don't need no ice when she's got a cold storage plant for a husband. You're the coolest"—

But the patrol wagon was rolling away.

A Bank on Two Legs.

"For more than thirty years the most popular woodsman's bank in Maine was a bank on two legs," says Major Holmes Day, author of "King Spruce." "Until he was over seventy years old Uncle Nate Swan was conductor on the Bangor and Piscataquis railroad, running between the city and Moosehead lake. With him rode the woods and driving crews. When they forgot themselves and made a racket on his train he used to cuff them into submission, and no man ever raised his hand against Uncle Nate. When the men came out of the woods with their pay most of them realized from bitter experience that the city folks would get all their money away from them in a few days. As soon as they would get aboard the train they would begin to strip ten dollar bills off their rolls and hand the money to Uncle Nate to 'sink' for them, banking it on call. They never forgot, nor did he, and in all the years there was never a dispute between Conductor Swan and any of his depositors. When they came back on his train they were sure of enough money for their fare and their tobacco at the lake outfitting store. They wouldn't have known very well what to do with more."

Her Ideal Villain.

The following anecdote, taken from "My Story," by Hall Caine, is interesting:

Immediately after the production of "The Woman In White," when all England was admiring the arch villainy of Fosco, the author, Wilkie Collins, received a visit from a lady who congratulated him upon his success with somewhat icy cheer and then said: "But, Mr. Collins, the great failure of your book is your villain. Excuse me if I say you really do not know a villain. Your Count Fosco is a very poor one, and when next you want a character of that description I trust that you will not disdain to come to me. I know a villain and have one in my eye at this moment that would far eclipse anything that I have ever read of in books. Don't think that I am drawing upon my imagination. The man is alive and constantly under my gaze. In fact, he is my own husband."

The lady was the wife of Edward Bulwer Lytton.

Fixed Bayonets In London.

The privilege of marching through London with fixed bayonets is enjoyed by but very few regiments, such as the Royal fusileers, who trace their origin to Cromwell's trained bands, which in later years produced so famous a captain as John Gilpin. After the Royal fusileers, or perhaps even before them in point of regimental seniority, come the East Kent "Buffs," now the third of the line, who claim a similar city ancestry ,while the Royal marines for some reason or other also enjoy the same fixed bayonet rights in the city. A battalion of the grenadier guards was once impressed to serve as marines, and hence they share the privilege of the men who are "soldiers and sailors too." This also explains why that grenadier battalion has for its tattoo "Rule Britannia"—as a souvenir of the time when its combative existence was of the amphibious kind.—London Standard.

The Mental Jog.

"There is a certain type of person," said the business man, "especially in New York, who seems unable to understand what is said to him—or her—unless the statement or remark is prefixed by some catchword, usually the word 'listen.'

"For instance, I have a stenographer who simply stares at me in dumb amazement if I say anything to her without first saying 'Now, listen.' If I begin to dictate a letter to her she will not write a word if I forget to give that mental jog. When I snap that at her she will scratch like mad. She is not the only one. The telephone girl cannot take a message unless it has that prefix. When I am out of the office and try to talk over the wire with her I must always begin, 'Now, listen,' or else she is hopelessly at sea and seems not to understand a word I say."—New York Press.

Different In Books.

In the books this is the way they say it:

"Outside the wind moaned unceasingly, its voice now that of a child which sobs with itself in the night, now that of a woman who suffers her great pain alone, as women have suffered since life began, as women must suffer till life wears to its weary end. And mingled with the wailing of wind rain fell—fell heavily, intermittently, like tears wrung from souls of strong men."

Outside the books we say:

"It's raining."—Atchison Globe.

The Brakeman's Joke.

"Ran over a cow this morning up above Coffeyville," said the brakeman to a reporter.

"How did it happen?" asked the reporter.

"She was drinking out of a creek under a bridge," shouted the brakeman as he swung on to the last car and went grinning out of town.—Kansas City Times.

Brutal

Jimson—Where's your wife? Haven't seen her often lately. Weed—Oh, I sent her away on a little vacation, Jimson—So? Where'd she go? Weed—To the Thousand Isles. Jimson—Stay long? Weed—Yes. I told her to take a week to each island.—Judge.

A Saving Grace.

Florence—I can't understand why Ethel married Mr. Gunson. He is old enough to be her father. Lawrence—Yes, but he is rich enough to be her husband.—Exchange.

A Wheat Hospital.

"This wheat has been through the hospital," said a miller. "I can tell by the fine polish on the grains. Wheat that has been through the hospital for smut disease comes out better than well wheat."

The wheat grains, in truth, shone so that one could almost see one's face in them.

"You can see your face in them, can't you?" said the miller. "And no wonder. They've been through drastic treatment—drastic. Smut is a nasty disease, a kind of mold, that changes the starch and gluten in wheat to a black powder. When you see flour full of black specks it is a sign that some of the wheat was smutted. The cure is first to wash the wheat thoroughly. Then you dry it. Then you scour it. Then you dry it again. Finally you brush it. Wheat hospitals—they are found in most grain elevators nowadays—have big machines for washing, drying, scouring and brushing the grain, and wheat on its very last legs comes out of those infirmaries as spruce and blooming as a football girl."—Buffalo Express.